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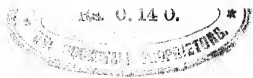
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THE SIEGE OF  
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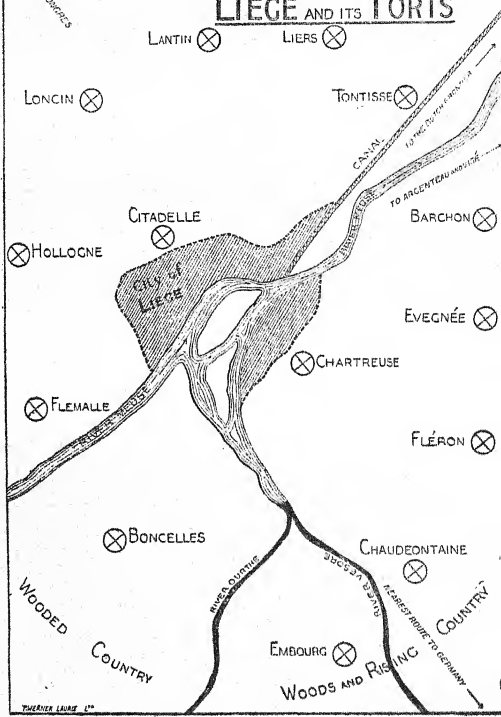
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# THE SIEGE OF LIÈGE

A Personal Narrative

BY

PAUL HAMELIUS, Dr.Phil.

Professor of English Literature in the University of Liège

*With a Plan of the Forts*

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## PREFACE

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THE difficulty of writing an account like the present does not reside in the circumstance that some truths, such as the cowardice of a good many women and a good few men, should not be specified; for one may state general facts without disclosing personalities. The real difficulty is that only individual facts are life-like, and that unless a man's profession and character are allowed to show through his conduct and speech, his deeds and words are not worth disclosing. This difficulty I shall try to obviate by using initials and other disguises, which may individualise facts without betraying persons.

The man whose experiences have been most valuable to me is a musician, who shouldered his gun like a true artist and a true man, stood sentry over the pigs of the garrison at night, and quaffed the full cup of warlike emotion which Fate had brought to the lips of all who had stomach for the liquor. The genius of tragedy put him where he could see shells flying over the town, the night attacks of Germans marching up to the Belgian forts in parade march, and suddenly blown out of existence by a single discharge. Those

things I have not seen myself, but can only repeat from his conversation.

The reader may grumble at my having done nothing that is worth recording, and talked so much to all sorts of people, professors, lawyers, servants and neighbours. But that is the only way in which he, the reader, can get at the psychology of a besieged town, unless he procures a German invasion of England in order to experience things for himself.

May I add that the writing of this record, which has no other claim to attention than its sincerity, has been forced upon me by external circumstances, and that I hope to confine my future publications, should there be any, to my special branch of literary history, the only subject about which I have so far printed anything.

I cannot be held responsible for the map.

*August, 1914.*

LONDON.

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# THE SIEGE OF LIÈGE

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE LIE OF THE LAND.

SOME two years ago, a friend was walking with me near the house in which I was living during the recent siege and bombardment, on the pleasant hill of Cointe, and we were looking down upon the railway bridge of Val-Benoît, that carries all the traffic between Cologne and Paris, engines whistling, the wheels of the neighbouring colliery whirring, carts rumbling, steam and smoke blowing from the town, works and factories.

"What an ideal battle-ground for modern armies," my friend suddenly observed. "A large river, with cargoes of wheat and wood, railway lines along both banks, running from south-east to north-west, and crossed by the main line running east and west from Germany to Brussels, a steam tram, and all the industries that modern war requires; steel and iron works, coalpits, factories for arms and explosives, all things necessary for repairs and supplies."

The thought had never struck me that modern war might want and use all that has been invented to add to man's comfort, and that the conveniences of travel, production and exchange might all be turned into tools for the destruction of human life. I thought of

war, as most of us do, as a thing apart from the resources of modern industry.

The experience of 1914 has falsified my friend's prophecy, for none of the resources pointed out by him have been actually used by armies in the field, except the means of transport, railways and motor conveyances. All through the fight, the river was lying still, no craft stirring, all the barges moored on the left, Belgian bank, for fear of being used for bridge-making by the Germans. The roads were alive with motor cars rushing about with staff officers and messages, but the railways did little beyond carrying men and supplies to their proper places, and the collieries were emptied of their hands, who were employed in digging trenches round the forts. Most works were emptied of their labourers, as the army and civil guard called out many, and the volunteering movement swept away most of the younger men among the rest. It should be remembered that Belgian industrial workers have their homes in villages, and come to their works, mills, yards and pits by railway for the week. The news of the storm drove most of them back to their countryside, and the town was emptied of its manhood.

Military operations, therefore, so far as I understand them, were confined to the antiquated methods of marching, besieging and defending forts and trenches in the fashion that most of us have realised from books.

The topographical conditions are very simple, and can be understood at a glance on the map. The deep and wide ditch of the valley of Meuse makes a sharp division between two highlands of very different type. The approach from Aix-la-Chapelle lies through rocky,

barren hills, partly wooded, and partly furrowed by rapid, cool and clear mountain streams, the most important of which are the Ourthe, and its tributary the Vesdre, which flows westward from the German frontier, and brings with it the railway line from Germany. This country is very broken, difficult of access, and easily defended by skirmishing parties. It was well-known to our officers and men, who had lately conducted manœuvres in that ground.

Another approach from Germany lies in easier, flatter land, about ten miles to the north of Liège, over the little frontier town of Visé, which lies close to the Dutch border, in the part where the valley of the Meuse widens out before losing itself in the plains of Holland. Here there is no railway, but the Germans were reported to have planned one long ago, and to have carried it down to the river soon after the war broke out. This I cannot confirm from personal knowledge. The country just described is known to the tourist as *pretty* and *picturesque*, as he looks up at the hills from the bottom and from the roads and paths on the slopes. Many lovers of that scenery prefer to survey it from the high levels, and to follow the wide sweeping lines of the broad hills as they descend towards the river beds or rise towards the higher plateaux on the German border, near Aix-la-Chapelle. Guide books and outsiders generally call it by the poetical name of Ardennes, which, in the parlance of our farmers and geographers, has a much narrower and more definite meaning.

Such, then, are the two lines of German attack, which were so toughly defended by our Belgian soldiers. Between those well-watered hills of the



Ardennes and the western plain, afterwards to be described, the valley of the Meuse winds its way from the south-west to the north-east, flat alluvial soil forming its bottom, and scrubwood of oak or beech covering its steep rocky slopes. But in many parts its natural features have been obliterated by the industry of man, who has raised huge works and factories, especially steel and iron works, on what were formerly marshy meadows, and who has heaped up hillocks of slags and rubbish from foundries and coalmines on the hillside. Some of the soil has in this way disappeared under black layers of débris, while another part is crossed by railway lines and bridges, or occupied by coalyards or by the large but mean-looking sooty brick-built villages where the toilers of the country live. Even the sky does not escape the taint of soot and smoke, huge chimney stacks throwing up volumes of thick dark reek into the air, and the wind whirling up a black and penetrating dust. This production of dirt and dividends has its centre in Seraing, the town of steel and mining, where some of the fighting took place in the early stages of the war.

Further south and north, away from Liège, the country still looks green and fresh, and is a favourite holiday resort, although to some extent spoiled by villas and hotels that do not harmonise with the landscape. The railway lines in this busy and rich valley lead up to Namur, where they branch off to enter France along the courses of two rivers—the Meuse, that flows from Givet and Dinant, and the Sambre, that passes Charleroi. We feel Paris very near, and when a German soldier the other day, not knowing the country, asked me how far we were from Paris, I could

only answer: "Five hours in a fast train, start at seven, arrive at twelve." They could not quite do it at that rate.

Once the valley of the Meuse is crossed, the uplands on the western side, which extend in monotonous sameness to the neighbourhood of Louvain for about fifty miles, mark the line of Belgian retreat. Here is a rolling plain, covered with wheat and beetroot, without large rivers, rocks, or woods, suited for open battles, but which does not seem to have been much used for military purposes.

Most of the fighting was in the hills of the Ardennes and in the northern part of the valley.

We had been told that the first great battle was to be expected near Waremme, in the middle of the heavy loam plain of Hesbaye, but no such battle has been reported by the newspapers, and when I did see part of the Belgian field army, with its train of motor vans and lorries of all descriptions and colours, it was standing near Tirlemont, in the afternoon of August 12th, with aeroplanes circling over it.

A third possible line of fighting was the valley of the Meuse itself, with its comparatively easy approach for the Germans from the North or Dutch end, and its roads and railways leading south-east towards the city of Namur, on the confluence of the Meuse and Sambre. Nobody seems to have followed this line, presumably because it was blocked at both ends by the large fortresses of Liège and Namur. But it has been crossed at various points by Germans coming down from the eastern hills and passing the river without taking the exposed roads at the bottom.

After they had entered Liège, and while their

chances of retaining possession of it seemed very doubtful to us uninformed civilians, they evidently foresaw that a force moving along the river banks might attempt to dislodge them, and they took elaborate precautions to defend themselves against an attack from upstream. The bridge of Val-Benoît they strengthened by means of a floating defence composed of two barges moored in the river and linked up with both banks by means of a series of strong beams. The approach to the bridge itself they closed with barbed-wire fences, which apparently were never necessary, as no movement parallel with the banks of the river seems to have been attempted. On the part of the hill surrounding my garden, and commanding the river from the north-west, they dug trenches for their little machine guns, and planted bigger cannon. Some of the larger trees they cut down, but they spared the underwood, which sheltered their batteries from observation. There was quite a traffic with arms, ammunition, soup, bread and sausages up our road. We used to call out to the sergeants : "Should we sleep in our cellars to-night ?" to which they answered : "No, too early yet." The men came to our front gardens for water and coffee, and one of their officers expressed the hope that the Belgians would not attack them there for fear of destroying the lives and property of their own people. Let not the reader imagine this as a scene of horror and fear ; soldiers and civilians laughed at their own attempts to carry on conversations without the medium of a common language, and our trees waved soothingly over it all.

Finally, nothing came of the anticipated attack, and when I left Liège the trenches and batteries were still silent.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PEOPLE.

THE attitude of the Belgian people during this crisis cannot be understood unless something is known of their national past and habits of mind.

Let the English reader try to realise that a little nation of seven million souls, of whom hardly one able-bodied young man out of three is trained to arms, living in an exposed and open country, without natural frontiers, and without warlike traditions or ambitions, have had to face an invasion from the most formidable military power of the world, the victor of 1870; that they have taken up the challenge without flinching, knowing that their country must needs be overrun and laid waste, even if final success might be hoped for. Let him remember that German diplomacy came with an offer of financial advantages and favourable treatment in return for our compliance, and that not a voice in the country was heard to advise submission to German claims. We were not ignorant of the doom that was hanging over our heads, but all of us accepted the alternative—war, rather than slavery.

No doubt the more thoughtful among us knew that we stood between Scilla and Charybdis, and that subservience to Germany meant war with England and France. But I do not think that this practical consideration weighed much with our nation's mind, for the German demands seemed so outrageous

and brutal, and the offer of a compensation in money so insulting, that an instant recoil fixed us all in one resolve. "Why spend so much money on spies, and know us so little!" was one friend's typical remark.

The nation took its stand upon this decision with a unanimity quite unusual among a people divided by fierce party feuds, different in language, and in what is conventionally called race. For we Belgians have few of the external marks of national unity. We are held together by tradition, and, perhaps most of all, by a common and ingrained love of freedom, not so much liberty in the abstract, for which we are not idealistic enough, as the daily habit of doing as we like, speaking out, and behaving without any feeling of restraint. Class feeling counts for very little among us, as the poor will not cringe, nor are they expected to cringe. Perhaps our private manners suffer a little from these easy-going ways, and our public life certainly allows an amount of high feeling and vigorous language that would astonish most outsiders.

All this can hardly be expected to foster a liking for German discipline or German method, and our traditional sympathies certainly are on the French side, although not so completely as to blind our judgment. Though most of us speak French, often with a provincial accent and idiom, many know German, and some English, while the mother tongue of more than half our people, those that live in the north and west, on the sea coast and along the Dutch frontier, is Flemish, *i.e.*, a Teutonic vernacular practically identical with Dutch.

The very common dislike of Germany is often tempered, among the educated and propertied classes, by

respect for their organisation and efficiency, and by the worship of Force. None of us could make light of coming events in the way the English are able to do in their insular security. Still, through all the legitimate fear which a small nation may well feel when overwhelmed by such a powerful neighbour, the voice of cowardice was not heard. Not one person ventured to suggest that our Government might or ought to have granted the right of passage. No one blamed the King for appealing to Socialist support and appointing Van der Velde, the Socialist leader, a Minister of State. As this appointment is likely to be misunderstood, it may as well be stated that a Minister of State in Belgium does not belong to the Cabinet, and has no actual power. He is simply one of the prominent politicians whom the King (whose own powers are strictly limited and constitutional) may consult officially in important circumstances.

It should be remembered that our country has for over twenty-six years been ruled by a strongly clerical Conservative party, and that the secularising policy of the French Republic has roused bitter anger and resentment among many of our countrymen. A defeat of France at the present day would certainly be felt by them to be a visitation and warning of Providence for having turned against the Roman Church.

While the subject of the present book is Liège and the share which she took in recent events, a reference to the Flemings of north-western Belgium and to their attitude towards Germany seems unavoidable. The French-speaking and France-loving section of the Belgians have always accused their Dutch-speaking countrymen of being too fond of Germany and even of

being agents or tools of the what is somewhat vaguely described as Pan-Germanism. This opinion is shared by those Germans who dream of restoring the Holy Empire of the Middle Ages, including the Low Countries as well as many other regions which have now gone to a different allegiance. The Flemings themselves are very innocent of any such schemes, though a few of their leaders may occasionally have advocated more independence against France and a closer union with their Teutonic cousins.

What must always stand in the way of such a union is the difficulty of reconciling the Belgian temperament to the ideas of discipline upon which rests the strength of the Prussian army. If individual freedom is allowed to assert itself, the striking power of the State must suffer. If the State is maintained at a high tension of efficiency the individual may ultimately rebel, as the Alsace-Lorrainers, whose language and past are German, have done for over forty years. There seems no escape from this dilemma which must always stand in the way of friendship between Teutons within the State and those outside.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE POSITION OF LIÈGE AND ITS FORTS.

WHAT has been written in Chapter I. about the contrast between the deep furrow of the Meuse valley and the vast uplands east and west of it applies also to the narrow corner in which stand the city and forts of Liège. The town is nestled at the bottom of the hills, spreading eastwards into the wide, flat expanse of the valley, and climbing west towards the plateau up steep curving streets and stairways, which make it one of the picturesque cities of Europe.

In itself it has no military value or defences of any kind. The old city wall is only an antiquarian memory, and no trace of gates or ramparts is left. There used to be two old forts near the heart of the town, on the two crests overlooking it east and west. A smaller one was in the Citadel, in grounds partly turned into a public square, where the broken remnants of an early nineteenth century stronghold and brick barracks still testify to a bloodless military past. Tourists will remember this as the Point de Vue, starred by Mr. Baedeker, from which the river bridges and church steeples of Liège can be surveyed in their transparent veil of grey or bluish smoke. The eastern La Chartreuse is also an old barracks, on the



hill facing the Citadel across the valley ; it lies in a less frequented quarter. Neither of these two central forts is even mentioned in Mr. H. Belloc's account of Liège as a ring-fortress, to which we shall have to refer again, nor does either of them seem to have played any part in the late events.

The town itself is just one of the many old cities of the Continent, with a distinctly ecclesiastical stamp in the number and variety of its old churches, partly Romanesque and partly Gothic, and its remnants of monastic buildings, which remind the visitor of the capitals of former episcopal states in Germany. Some quaint private houses are still standing in streets that have escaped being modernised.

Of these the occasional visitor sees little, being confined to the commonplace, straight-lined streets of the new town, which has sprung up for the last fifty years between the railway station and the old centre. But he may still enjoy the green and flowery squares and avenues that lie round the river banks, near the new bridges, and that enclose the more fashionable parts of the city. Those avenues and squares have been alternately filled with Belgian and German guns and transport wagons, and have witnessed the muster of commandeered motor cars and horse wagons, the passage of regiments marching forward and retreating, and of prisoners of war of both parties. They have been dug with trenches for the enemy's machine guns preparing to bombard the town, and the memories of days of sorrow and disaster will always haunt their trees and lawns.

Although the narrower arms of the river visible in the maps of past centuries have all been filled up one

after another, leaving only the names of *île*, *pont*, and *quai* behind in places where neither island, bridge nor quay are to be seen, yet the town is still traversed by two long water-courses, one of them the big embanked Meuse itself, which is not unlike the Seine in Paris, with its lower banks used for loading and unloading barges, while its higher embankments are lined with trees and used for public walks. The other, less striking channel of water takes the overflow of the waters of the Ourthe through the town, and is therefore called *la dérivation*.

Of all these features of Liège, only the bridges and the Citadel have played any part in the recent war. The bridges were all-important to the Germans, as they maintained communication between the eastern, German bank, and the western, on the way to Brussels and Paris. We therefore found it surprising that the Belgians should not have destroyed them in their retreat. Only one seems to have been partly blown up by them, and was, as I understand, repaired by the Germans; the others were, and apparently still are, intact. The only railway bridge, le Pont du Val-Benoît, suffered no damage, but could not be used during my stay in Liège, perhaps because the tunnels and bridges leading down to it from Germany were blocked and destroyed, and no doubt also because the fire of the forts would at once have put an end to all railway traffic. According to one of the practices of warfare, which do not recommend themselves to the civilian's mind, the stone bridge of the Boverie was secured from Belgian shells by placing in the middle of it a removal van filled with Belgian prisoners, whose lives thus served as a security for the preservation of

the bridge. To make the position quite clear, the van selected was one painted in our national colours—black, yellow and red.

The Citadel also played an active part in one incident of the German occupation, for some of the guns with which the town was twice bombarded are said to have stood upon it.

No account of the siege of Liège can be complete without a reference to the long railway dyke called "le Plan incliné," which we may interpret as the steep incline. This dyke takes its rise at the main station of the Guillemins and runs upwards through one side of the city like a gigantic wall, which is crossed by a number of vaulted gates. The roadways east and west pass below these gates, which bear some likeness to the passages into old fortified towns. When the Germans were in possession, and prepared to meet an attack from outside, which never came, they used this steep incline as one of their main lines of defence, lining it with sentries above and blocking up the gates below by means of barricades. A sketch of one of these has been published in England. This slope is so steep that formerly trains used to be hauled up and let down by means of a rope, until the rope broke, and a whole train came flying down into the station, causing great damage. Nowadays, two strong engines slowly push the cars up the hill, and the descent is effected with the aid of small cars specially constructed to carry powerful brakes. Passengers from Cologne to England may have noticed the unusual shape of these brake cars at the junction of Ans, below Fort Loncin, where the incline reaches the brow of the plateau, and where, the line to Brussels be-

coming nearly level, those powerful brakes can be dispensed with, and are left behind.

Before the late turmoil burst over us, no town could well present a less warlike appearance than ours. The garrison was a small one, and artillery was seldom seen. Still, the place was a famous centre for the manufacture and sale of small arms, especially of sporting guns and revolvers. Boys and girls were constantly seen walking about with bundles of gun-barrels or wooden stocks on their shoulders, mostly in an unfinished condition, for the processes of manufacturing were still to a great extent carried on in the workers' homes, and after each of the separate operations of hammering, filing, polishing and fitting on the barrels, locks, triggers and stocks was finished, the pieces had to be taken to the manufacturers, where the work done was approved and paid for.

The effects of this industry on the national character of the Liégeois are not altogether pleasant. Far too many firearms were on sale in the shops, and far too many people were familiar with their mechanism and use. The reports of our daily papers showed how easily violence and suicide were induced by this state of things, which ought to have been suppressed long ago. This year the Liège gun-maker has been in a position to witness some of the results of his daily labour. Unfortunately for himself, he has also been tempted to use the familiar weapon against the invaders, and has thus brought down reprisals upon many of his peaceful fellow citizens.

A glance at any simple map of Liège and surrounding forts shows that the thirteen forts are all clear away from the town, and several miles distant. A

very graphic map, reprinted in the *Times* of August 8th, 1914, is accompanied by a description of the ring fortress by the expert geographer, Mr. H. Belloc, which I am unable to better, and from which I shall therefore ask permission to quote before I give my own less technical account.

"The works round Liège," Mr. Belloc writes, "consist of twelve isolated forts forming the most perfect and most formidable ring of defences in Europe or in the world. The ideal ring-fortress would be a town capable of ample provisioning and lying within an exact circle of heights at an average of some 8,000 yards distance, each with a self-contained closed work, and each such work within support of at least two others. No such absolutely exact conditions exist, of course, in reality, but skill and the relief of the soil combined have endowed Liège with a ring of forts very nearly combining these conditions. The circle, though not exact, is more nearly exact than in the case of any other ring-fortress. Its largest diameter is not 20 per cent. in excess of its shortest. The greatest distance between any two works is but 7,000 yards, the average less than 4,000. Each work is easily supported by two others, and often by three, and in one case by four."

Although the average distance from the forts to the centre is only about four miles as the crow flies, they cannot be reached in a short time, as the way to them lies over rough and hilly country. The nearest to the Dutch frontier is Pontisse, not far from the left bank of the river, about nine miles from the meadows of Eysden, the nearest Dutch village. The reason why this interval was left open I cannot guess. Perhaps

the lower valley of the Meuse is too low and open to be effectively protected. Perhaps that little tract of marshy land, containing neither an east and west railway line, nor a stone bridge over the river, was not considered important enough. Whatever the reasons, that was the road of German approach, as we had anticipated ever since the Morocco crisis.

Facing Pontisse, but on the opposite (right) side is Barchon, which seems to have been attacked most fiercely and in the earliest stages of the struggle. Pontisse and Barchon command the northern approach from Holland, and contradictory reports about them were afloat in Liège, and have partly found their way into the *Times*. Barchon was believed to have been slightly damaged at the outset; later on it was reported as *silenced*, and finally both it and its companion Pontisse were said to have been *neutralised* (whatever that may mean) in consequence of an agreement after the Germans had begun to bombard the town. I give this as an example of the rumours that are circulated in a besieged town; when the truth is disclosed it will be curious to see how far those rumours were founded.

The crest of the plateau between the Lower Meuse and the Vesdre (which, it will be remembered, is followed by the railway line from Germany), was held by the large fort of Fléron, flanked on its left by Evegnée, and on its right by Chaudfontaine. The River Vesdre passes between the smaller forts of Chaudfontaine and Embourg. Between Embourg and Boncelles, another large fort on the ridge, which commands the upper course of the Meuse, runs the latter's tributary, the Ourthe (also followed by a railway line). Bon-

celles is the fort that was subjected to the drastic change of costume described further on in the present chapter. It is also the one most accessible from my neighbourhood, so that most of my informants, in so far as they were eye-witnesses, were acquainted with scenes and incidents about Boncelles.

The six forts mentioned above all stand on the right bank. They had to bear the brunt of the first eastern attack. The six on the left (western) side came into play soon after the northernmost of them, Pontisse, which has Liers and Lantin for its neighbours to the west. Lantin was the place to which a Belgian officer asked that his men might be conducted when our army retreated from Liège, and when I first heard the ominous words: "Lest they should be taken prisoners by the Germans." Nearly due west of the town, looking down into the important junction of Ans, stands Loncin, where General Leman was stationed after leaving the town. It was no doubt due to Loncin that the Germans were unable to move an engine from Liège after they had occupied the stations and railway bridges. As they did no damage to the line they must have intended to use it in their advance towards Brussels somewhat later. As long as I stayed in Liège, Belgian railwaymen were free to move to and fro about the station of Ans, and single engines were run on the line even while patrols of uhlans crossed and attacked it, and after the telegraph wires were cut. In this way communications were kept up between the region occupied by the Germans and the rest of Belgium, although few besides the railway people knew or availed themselves of the opportunity.

I have not much to tell about the western forts of Hollogne on the plateau, and of Flemalle near the left bank of the Meuse, facing my neighbour Boncelles.

The maps show that the forts belong to two different types, a large, more powerful one alternating fairly regularly with a smaller, weaker type. I have been informed by experts that they really form a double line of defence, so that if any single one should fall, the two right and left of it ought still to be able to continue to hold the enemy back. They command an extensive view of the four valleys: Upper Meuse, Lower Meuse, Ourthe and Vesdre, whose meeting forms the hollow basin in which the city stands. They have been planned by the Belgian military engineer, General Brialmont, who has also been responsible for the building of the fortresses of Roumania. A sketch of a typical fort, taken from one of Brialmont's books, has lately appeared in one of the leading illustrated periodicals of London. This is an ideal view, taken from a level above the ground, and showing what might appear to an observer placed on a flying machine.

The mere pedestrian sees nothing but a slope of grass, as the forts, while placed in commanding positions, show no structures that might be used as targets. Personally, I have only visited one of the Brialmont forts in the neighbourhood of Antwerp. They all consist of two parts: An outside rampart with mitrailleuses worked by infantry and intended to repulse storming parties, and one or more inside towers of concrete containing the large guns. The ammunition is handled underground, where the loading also takes place. Then the machinery goes up like



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a lift, and after the firing, disappears underground again. A flat steel roof shelters the guns and gunners from bombardment. The turret and guns are arranged in a way similar to those in a man-of-war.

Those forts were supposed to be practically impregnable, and were garrisoned by very few men. One of their great advantages is that the men inside have a perfect knowledge of the scenery about them, having noted the height and distance of every landmark so that they can point their guns with almost mathematical certainty.

Although the position of those forts is not correctly given in the maps of Belgium published by our Ministry of War, and although the approach to them has been carefully guarded, yet in these days of spies and aeroplanes it is probable that the enemy was not without information about them. Any tourist might at least take snapshots of the surrounding scenery, and afterwards locate them on the map by a careful study of topography. By comparing his photographs of farmhouses, church spires, and trees with the features of the map, he might calculate the pointing of his own artillery, and thus reach some degree of accuracy in his firing. This danger was met by the Belgian authorities by means of the most drastic measures. Houses were destroyed, trees cut down, and even a church, that of Boncelles, is said to have disappeared. Large bodies of colliers and navvies were set to work digging trenches and throwing up breastworks, so that when the attack did come, the scenery was altered in appearance, and the foreigner found it difficult to know it again. Before the hurly-burly came we used to take walks to the higher points of the region in order

to enjoy the wide views and the pure air, and all the names now on the book of fame stood for idyllic villages, remote from the smoke and stir of cities, in the midst of sloping meadows drained by little brooks, where cows lay lazily chewing the cud, and where the jolly gunner in his blue and red cap was heard laughing and chaffing his comrades and the country girls.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SPIRIT OF LIÈGE.

THE place of the city of Liège in the Belgian State is somewhat peculiar. Officially, it is just one of the nine provincial capitals. In fact, being the seat of a University, a Court of Appeals, and a School of Music of world-wide fame, especially for the violin, having down to the close of the eighteenth century been the centre of a separate and independent State, the Episcopal Principality of Liège, and being moreover the largest French-speaking town of Belgium (Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent are Flemish), it has always maintained some claim to being a capital. This claim has been fostered by its historians, who could not include it among the Spanish Netherlands, to which it never belonged, and who have made modern Liège acquainted with the institutions and vicissitudes of old Liège, the civilising action of its Prince-Bishops, and the struggles maintained for centuries by the self-governing municipality against the sovereign and the chapter of canons.

New life has been imparted to all this antiquarian lore by the position which the city has lately taken up as the champion of the French culture and language against the northern, Flemish half of Belgium. Liège has lately called herself the capital of the Walloons. This is the name of those Belgians who live in the south-east, *i.e.*, in the

hilly part of the country, as contrasted with the lower plains that extend to the north-west towards the North Sea. The language used in their schools and in their reading is French, of which practically all of them have a sufficient command. The more rustic speech of the countryside and of the less educated classes is a group of dialects of the same family as French. Having neither a national idiom nor a great tradition, they are neither marked with a distinct national stamp nor animated by patriotic feelings in the same way as, *e.g.*, the French or English, and perhaps the German invasion has hurt them all the more deeply because they understand little of international politics, and care nothing about the problems involved. Most of their political interests may be summed up as party affairs, in which the main currents of European thought, clericalism of the Roman type, socialism and radicalism of the anti-clerical, Continental variety, play their leading parts. Their military past, known chiefly to native antiquarians, dates far back, and is no living memory to them. In addition to the dislike of German discipline and method already mentioned in Chapter II., the Walloons had another reason for fearing the power of Germany. They began to feel that the supremacy of their French language was threatened by the progress of Flemish, a Teutonic idiom, and they organised the movement in defence of the Gallic language and spirit, which is known as the Walloon movement.

In its origin, about ten years ago, this was nothing but a protest and a reaction against the increasing recognition of Dutch (or Flemish) in official use. After having for over half a century been practically

the only official language of Belgium, French has been gradually ousted from that position by a series of measures which tended to put Flemish on a footing of equality with it, and which go under the name of the Flemish movement. The Walloon movement was initiated in hostility to this, and was intended to maintain and raise the status of the French language. While accusing the promoters of the Dutch language of serving Pan-Germanic interests, and favouring possible encroachments of the Fatherland on Belgian independence, the Walloon party really glorified and spread the spirit of nationalism, which has lately made itself felt in France, and which has the well-known writer and politician, Maurice Barré, for its mouth-piece. All this squabbling about languages and national spirits, while undoubtedly concealing the germ of a serious danger for the future of Belgian unity, has not affected the attachment of our people to their country. It did not prevent us from rallying vigorously round our King when the hour of trial came.

## CHAPTER V.

### BELGIAN ANTICIPATIONS OF LATE EVENTS.

WE Belgians cannot affect to be surprised at the hurricane that is sweeping over us. While trying to hope for the best, we all knew our neutrality to be a very precarious thing; we knew that the guarantee of the Powers was only effective while it was unanimous, and that if one of the great Powers thought it advisable to use our territory for moving her troops, we should not escape the lamentable fate of becoming once more the cockpit of Europe. No doubt the other Powers would help us, but that would neither restore our dead to life nor keep our houses from burning. Our fate was to live the days of Waterloo over again at a century's distance, and such being our fate, there was nothing for it but to face it like men.

That our soldiers have not undergone their fate like sheep is due in the first place to the foresight and courage of that unpopular monarch, King Leopold II. Let every Belgian and Englishman who has blamed his colonial methods of government (it would be a mistake to think that we Belgians were afraid of blaming him) do justice to the man's memory at the present hour. He clearly saw the impending cloud, and made preparations for it. If we may repeat his own homely joke when taunting a member of our Parliament for opposing his contemplated fortifications of the Meuse: "Never go out without an umbrella, sir!"



He initiated the two measures which have saved our nation from the shame of neglecting their duty as keepers of the peace and as wardens of one of the highways of Europe. One was the building of the forts, the other was the reform and increase of our army.

Our Parliaments never liked spending money for military purposes. A convenient phrase for trying to evade our responsibilities to Europe was to declare that our neutrality was in the hands of the Powers, and that we might trust them to defend it. The answer to this is that we first have to do our duty to ourselves and to them, and that we have no claim on their assistance unless we have first done our utmost. Party politicians might try to hoodwink the public into supineness on this point, but none of our three kings failed to see and do what was right.

As the fortress of Antwerp was built in the teeth of a violent opposition, so the forts of Liège were given to a reluctant country amid protests and complaints. The King had found in Brialmont the leading military engineer of the period, and he commissioned him to recast the whole system of defence. Up to about 1880 it was a dogma of Belgian policy that in case of a foreign invasion our government was to retire to Antwerp and hold that place until England and other Powers who had guaranteed our independence would come to our assistance. This settled idea had to be given up in favour of a new system, which consisted in strengthening the valley of the Meuse, so as to prevent an army from crossing it either on its way from Germany to France, or from France into Germany. The latter hypothesis has probably not been seriously

contemplated, as the advantage of numbers was more and more on the German side. When the planning and building of the forts under the supervision of Brialmont himself was finally carried, it was found that our army was deficient in numbers and in quality. The latter defect was owing to an obsolete system of recruiting, which allowed any man called to barracks by the ballot or drawing of lots (tirage au sort, as we still call it), to find a poorer man as a substitute, pay him a small sum of money (the sum never quite rose to £80), and allow him to serve the country in his place.

The poorer man, who accepted the bargain of his own free will, might be expected by an English reader, familiar with the paid regular army of these islands, to turn out the more efficient soldier. Our officers did not find it so. He was less highly educated, physically less fit, and less open to military training than the richer man whose place he took. The word *remplaçant* (substitute) is in some Belgian dialects used as a term of reproach, and the whole system cannot be more vigorously exposed than it is in the famous scene where Sir John Falstaff lets off those that can afford to bribe him, and selects the weaker and poorer men for the service of the king: "Tut, tut! They'll fill a pit as well as better!"

King Leopold decided that this antiquated system had to go, and that Belgian gentlemen and farmers must serve their country in their own person, as Germans and Frenchmen had long been doing. He was not afraid of making public speeches on the subject, and notwithstanding the reluctance of his Parliamentary majority, he finally carried his point. The

law doing away with substitutes in the army was one of the last signed by him before his death. It must be pointed out that the army that did so well in August last was recruited partly under the old system and partly under the new, only the younger men having come in after the Bill was put in force.

At King Albert's accession, then, both the forts and the new rules for recruiting the Belgian army were in existence, but the numbers were still insufficient to man both the old stronghold of Antwerp and the new line of forts on the Meuse. They were greatly increased, and a complete renovation was contemplated, but it was far from completion when the storm burst.

The event that completely opened the eyes of such of us as were not irrecoverably blind was the quarrel over Agadir and Morocco in 1911. It had found Belgium very imperfectly prepared, and had made a deep impression on the minds of all. From that time onward reform and improvement went on hurriedly in our army. We heard of new cannon and new supplies, of new barracks and new rules of promotion. Officers grumbled and worked, resigned and were discharged, new ones came in, all was bustle and preparation. The general public wondered what we should have first, the improved Belgian army or the German attack. The municipalities made bargains with the Government about the expense of building new barracks, elderly gentlemen wrote to the papers because they were kept awake at night by the barking of dogs who were trained to draw the mitrailleuses of our infantry. Even evening tattoos of regimental bands were instituted in imitation of France.

Successive reviews disclosed that new horses and new saddles had been bought, and that the equipment of our soldiers was being rapidly renewed and completed. This tallied with the warlike reports that were brought to us by French newspapers, which have an enormous sale in Belgium. Strange to say, our educated Conservatives caught the war fever from France, the republican stronghold, and more or less accepted and spread the gospel of French nationalism.

While we had thus been preparing for coming events to the best of our ability, we saw no reason to be much more anxious this year than in former times. The fears that had been raised and dispelled before might, after all, prove to be unfounded again.

So that, when we suddenly found ourselves caught, we were both prepared and astonished at our predicament. I was struck with the great difference in mental attitude between the educated and uneducated classes. To those of our Belgian peasantry and working men who have never been soldiers, and they still form the majority, war was but a word, meaning something to be feared, killing and damage. They wondered, not knowing exactly what to expect. Those among us who knew a little more went through an agony of intense and emotional thought. Many told me that they lay sleepless, revolving in their minds such economic problems as were brought home to them by the usual course of their business, questions of food supply, of banking, production and consumption, and all agreed that all those questions had better be laid aside unsolved, they were too terrifying. The Englishman, with his harbours open, his shipping moving, his country in at least apparent calm and

comfort, may think the same thoughts, but they cannot come home to him so intensely.

The only feeling that gave us relief and rest was that after all the end was death, and that it might as well come at once. Starvation is a very near contingency on the Continent, and may reach the many who are not poor, for money cannot produce food where there is none. Factories close, railways and trams stop, all employment comes to an end. The reign of brutal force, to which we knew we must submit, might be bearable so far as the strict Prussian discipline could curb the brutal instincts that lie dormant in many men, and predominate in a few. But, as the only business left was killing, men might as well join in that, which would at least provide them with a crust of bread, a body of companions, and an object in life. Those that were too old for soldiering saw only a period of cattle-like submission before them, at the end of which they might or might not be left alive, to start their career anew on whatever foundations might then be left.

The display of organised force with which Germany is inseparably associated impressed many of us with the hopelessness of resistance. Despondency was universal, except among such of us as were gifted with sufficient elasticity to enjoy the excitement and the show.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE GATHERING OF THE STORM.

BELGIUM did not mobilise her troops all at once, as did the Dutch and, I believe, the Swiss. Being in the most exposed corner of Europe she wisely began collecting her army before events had taken a decisive turn. We had always anticipated an *attaque brusquee*, *i.e.*, an onslaught so sudden and unexpected that our line of defence would be passed before we had time to think of protecting ourselves. This our Prime Minister obviated by announcing that we ought to be ready before the Powers. As we are one of the weak States of the Continent, and as no wolf could possibly interpret the lamb's precautions as a step towards aggression, we were free to prepare ourselves openly, as the more formidable Powers were not.

The first call to arms brought to the barracks the flower of our army, the youngest, best-trained, and best chosen of our soldiers, those who remembered the Morocco affair and had taken part in the late manoeuvres. Mostly beardless and still somewhat boy-like, a little over twenty, and mostly unmarried. Their reservists' dresses—cotton trousers, short vest and cap—fairly new and in good order. Their going was not tragic, as we might still hope that the storm could be averted.

No doubt this first mobilisation had been advised by the friendly Powers, and probably its effect was

to prevent an early rush of German motor cars and cavalry into our country. Then Holland mobilised her whole army all at once, evidently acting under the same advice as ourselves. The Prince Consort (a German) devoted his attention to the Red Cross, while his Queen reviewed troops and issued proclamations.

Saturday, August 1st.—

Up to this date we all watched developments with an anxiety that we had not felt on former occasions, but without losing hope. A European conflagration, entailing incalculable loss, and bringing no very clear advantage to anyone, seemed too mad to be possible.

What brought it nearer to me was a call from my neighbour, Mr. R., an officer on the reserve list, whom I had only known in mufti, and who appeared in regimentals, much moved. "Nothing good brewing. Might last long. Had left his servant well provided with means, would I look after his house in his absence? I knew German, and might help." I promised to do what I could; at least, as long as I stayed in Liège.

Mr. R.'s servant later on proved to be quite capable of shifting for herself. She had been laughing while getting her master's bag ready, and she went laughing through siege, bombardment and occupation. When I saw her last she was distributing coffee to German soldiers and trying to converse with them by means of signs and monosyllables. Her whole philosophy was summed up in her motto: "I am a good hussar." "You don't know what it is," her master told her before leaving. He went up to the forts, where he had to attend to the barbed-wire entanglements. Where is he now?

I now felt it my duty to run across to my family in Brussels, and to find out how they were preparing to face the storm. This journey took me through our second mobilisation, which bore a graver character than the first. The men had been called up in the middle of the night by knocks at their doors and by the ringing of church bells. They were much older men, mostly married, with strong moustaches, and wearing patched-up, soiled and old reservists' dresses. They came up with thoughtful faces, their features hardened by toil. They all had shaved their chins, and their military books were showing between the buttons of their coats. I travelled among them from Liège to Brussels. They were crowded in anywhere, saloon carriages, third-class and corridors, and came in without tickets, silent and quiet.

Our compartment contained refugees from Germany. One man, who smiled and talked fluently in German and English, was an Italian bank clerk from Cologne, a young man of firm principles and logical views. He did not like war, therefore he went to Spain, the only European country likely to keep out of the trouble. Barcelona was a nice town where he was quite at home. If he had had more money he would have gone to Canada. Nice country, where he had friends also. Then, smiling upon a silly-looking English girl in front of him: "I geeve my skeen to nobodee!" His little bag containing his earthly belongings was under his feet, and he was provided with an umbrella. The Diogenes of the year of our Lord, 1914!

The English girl was coming from Cologne with her brother and another sister, all in tourists' kit.



One girl read a cheap novel, never raising her eyes to see the first scene in the world's greatest tragedy, and the boy asked me vacantly : "They are not mobilising, are they?" Innocents abroad ! Another human creature that looked strangely preposterous was an elderly clergyman with a bundle of golf sticks, probably blown away from Spa by the coming storm. The sight of golf sticks and tennis rackets reminded me of Rudyard Kipling's flannelled oaf !

During my short journey from Liège to Brussels, an hour and a half, the whole face of our country was rapidly changing. I found my people calm but ready.

The laying in of some food supplies was the first precaution taken, questions of where to fix one's abode during the war and how to provide one's self with money came next. Dry pease and beans, chocolate, hams, preserves of all kinds were in great demand, and the grocers and provision merchants found it hard to face the rush of buyers. They mostly decided to serve only their usual customers, and to abstain from raising prices. In this way most people were able to lay in a small stock against the possibilities of interrupted traffic, street fights and looting. The question of money was a serious one in a country where gold is seldom seen, and it was well known that all our well-to-do people had been hoarding gold coins in sufficient quantity to let the storm blow over. Banknotes, practically the only currency in a country where the silver coins are too heavy for large payments, and the cheque is little used, were at first refused everywhere. A banking clerk advised me to buy for twenty francs (the amount of the smallest banknote), pay in

paper, and take away the goods, whether the dealers liked it or not. This it appears was a lawful thing to do, our banknotes being payable on sight. The run on the banks was a senseless thing, as a private house can never be as safe as the cellars of a large bank. The crowds outside the banks were either kept waiting for hours and hours, while small payments were being delayed in order to gain time, or, if they became noisy, the firemen were called out and played the hose upon them, as was done in Liège at the beginning of the panic. This method will no doubt recommend itself to all those that object to meeting many creditors at the same time.

Where to go to is a problem that begins to trouble the poor only when they hear actual firing and try to escape to some neighbouring street or village. The middle class, who own country and town houses, and are accustomed to hotel life and foreign travel, had mostly thought the question over and settled it years before this war. The sea shore about Ostend, lying away from the main roads between Paris and Germany, and having the advantage of close vicinity to England, where food supplies were sure to remain plentiful, was selected by many fathers of families to put their wives and children there, while themselves faced the greater risks and watched over their earthly belongings. The countryside, where poultry, rabbits, pigs and potatoes could be procured, and where one could rely on the friendship of old country dependents and neighbours, was preferred by others. Some put themselves deliberately into the German lines, moving east of the Meuse in order to find themselves as soon as possible in the power of an organised and

disciplined army. A good number resolved to stay in their own homes, where there was no new rent to be paid, and where money would therefore go a longer way towards the purchase of food. For while the poor imagined the war as a wholesale butchering of civilians, the more enlightened among us thought more of the risk of starvation if operations lasted long enough to exhaust the food supply of Germany, who could no longer import from the States or from Russia, and who would naturally keep the wheat and meat for her own people rather than for neutrals or enemies. Many of us thought that the non-combatant's first duty was to clear out of Belgium if he could, and remove one of the too many mouths to be fed there. If Ugolino could have expelled any of his tower's inmates, he ought certainly to have done so.

The fear of being looted naturally predominated in the minds of merchants and shopkeepers. I knew of no case of robbery, and stolen goods may be difficult to dispose of in Belgium in this month of August, although it would be premature to prophesy. One large furniture shop that I know put up its beds for the wounded, provided bedding from its own stores, flew the Red Cross flag, and kept all the shop girls on duty for hospital service. In this way they were both useful and safe, at least for a time.

While in Brussels I witnessed the commandeering there, which was carried out with astonishing quickness and ease. Motors and horse-drawn vans were collected in large squares, numbered with whitewash, and sent off. In one street hundreds of horses were trotted about to be examined, and were marked on the hoofs or on the flanks. The most pathetic sight was

the yellowish dogs that draw the milkmaids', bakers' and costers' carts in the streets of Brussels. Their duty to the country consisted in drawing the mitrail-leuses of our infantry, and I saw a number of them taken away by soldiers and wagging their tails in excitement as they went along.

All this took place without many words or idle fuss. Our people, who are often restive and hard to manage, obeyed without delay. "For the first time," wrote one of our Brussels journalists, "the Belgian understands at once, and does as he is told." The lists of commandeered beasts and goods were written out by small boys, in uniforms, the younger pupils of some of our army schools.

Sunday, August 2nd.—

Having seen all safe in Brussels, I went back to my own house, rather from a sense that it is wrong to run away than because I expected to be of much use anywhere. Wholesale murder was going to be the only business and thought of Europe. I was unfitted to be a soldier, partly because I had passed the age limit and lacked training, but much more on account of a defective eyesight which had always made me shoot beside the targets. All I could do was to be there and keep a good heart. My knowledge of the German language and familiarity with the ways of their soldiers might, moreover, be of some use to my neighbours.

Soon after our second mobilisation came the news of the German ultimatum, which our Government at once communicated to the Press in moderate and cautious language. We were requested to allow a free passage to German troops through Belgium, to hand over our

fortresses of the Meuse to Germany, and in exchange we were offered compensation in money for damages that might be done. I stood in the railway station of Brussels when I read on a newspaper poster :

**"BELGIUM REFUSES."**

The biggest war in history was beginning.

We crossed two friends coming from Paris, who spoke of the quiet determination prevailing there, of the deadly stillness of the town, of the deep earnestness of the French nation. "Do you think the Germans are going to win?" "I hope not; but who is to know?" This attitude of resolution in front of the certainty of a tragic fate was that of all our nation. The humour of the situation was illustrated by a French cartoon which my friend had seen in Paris. A lady complains that her husband, her son and her coachman are called back to the army, and that her cook has returned to her village to help her mother who is alone at the farm. "Fortunately, my horses have been commandeered, for I have no one to look after them."

Another friend, B., was only concerned about the future of German culture. "If they lose, all their scientific training and achievements will be destroyed. And what is going to happen to our Flemish language and literature?"

The same friend has harrowing tales of the spy-hunting, of which I have seen nothing myself. Any person with an accent that seemed foreign, or with a face that raised distrust, was liable to be beaten and dragged to the police station. Windows were broken, houses were sacked, acts of revenge and

spite were committed against harmless Belgians. Sometimes the motives were of the meanest and most shameful. Creditors were hunted by their debtors, and private grudges were settled with the assistance of a blind and infuriated mob.

The train that took me home to Liège was full of German refugees from France. One was an elderly, shy and timid man, who was afraid of committing himself. Another party, composed of a young married pair, with three little girls, who had been born in France, and who spoke only French, was the most tragic group I ever met. Those people had been alienated from their country by a prolonged stay among the French, and their views and sympathies were really on that side. But the sense of military duty took the husband home to serve a cause that he hated, and a country that had ceased to be his.

"I won't be a deserter!" he kept repeating, while his wife urged him to leave the train and seek safety for himself and his family.

"I can see you shot dead now," she screamed; "why have we come so far, why not go to Spain, as I advised you to do?"

The man then began to tell us about the insolence of the German military caste, and related incidents of his time at barracks when he had been insulted and humiliated by sergeants. The other Germans listened in silence, knowing his words to be only too true. Coming from Paris, they only now learned that we Belgians were also involved, and exclaimed: "Europe against Germany; Germany is lost! The Kaiser is mad!"

At the next stop we found the station occupied by

civil guards and men in uniform moving hurriedly about. Shouts of "Vive la Belgique" greeted the train as it moved out of the station, a young priest waving his large black hat frantically on the platform.

There was a spy in our compartment. A pretty fair German woman from Antwerp, displaying a wedding ring to which she probably had no lawful claim, and telling rather inconsistent stories about her husband being too old to join the army, her wanting to see a friend in Liège, and pretending to read a novel in the midst of the excitement. Once or twice she tried to turn the conversation to the loss of business caused by the war, and probably her duties were to report on public opinion in Belgium, and try to find out whether our people would tamely submit to a German occupation. Her answer was written plain on the face of the whole country.

I had left Liège a peaceful, busy town, I found it again in a fever of military preparation.

This is the time to introduce to the reader the two members of my little household, the pair to whose confident and willing devotion I owe the comparative quiet and ease with which I lived through a period that turned most Liège houses into scenes of senseless fear.

Leonard is a fireman in a colliery, quite young, but entrusted with highly responsible duties, such as the handling of explosives, and familiar with danger and with the shadow of death in the many forms in which it falls on the miner's life. His wife, who conducts my small housekeeping, belongs to the chubby, sensible variety of womankind, and has only cried once during the siege and German occupation, that was when her

husband was away. She smiled at the fears of others, though cautious enough to sleep in the cellar even when no shells flew about.

Monday, August 3rd.—

For the next week I must confess to some confusion in my dates, having kept no diary, seen few newspapers, and passed through so many incidents and emotions that everybody lost count of time. I remember arguing at length with my people to discover whether the fifth day from this was a Friday or a Saturday, and surprising a German lieutenant on the Monday following by telling him the day of the week. The return of a congregation from Mass on Sunday the 9th, the third day of the German occupation, has firmly printed itself in my memory. Other dates I have had to reconstruct after my return to London, and the week has been so full that I have caught myself trying to insert an eighth day into it.

To civilians resident in Liège Monday the 3rd meant the actual beginning of war and siege, for the town is not walled, and the fighting drew nearer very gradually till the final surrender on Friday the 7th.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ATTACK ON LIÈGE.

No one has lived in vain who has experienced the thrill and fever of preparation and resolve in the early days of the attack, when nearly every man wore a uniform and carried a gun, when the civil guards felt elated at being useful to their country at last, and every man did his duty cheerfully and hopefully. The air shook with the rush of motorists and motor cyclists who, being freed from the trammels of speed limits, took staff officers and messages along the roads and sent foot passengers flying out of the way. Those motors that had to venture into dangerous ground were manned with parties of four armed men, often belonging to different regiments, so that colours and shapes of uniforms were mixed in picturesque variety. The commandeering of motors was one of the sights. They lined the boulevards in endless files, and were numbered and taken over in a moment.

The conventional figure of a martial officer on horseback, such as we have learned from equestrian statues to associate with heroism, was hardly to be seen. Officers' horses were led up and down by orderlies, but the motor was obviously supplying their place in active service. After the German occupation I saw only a few of their officers on horseback. No doubt this would be different in the field.

Another strange sight was the driving in of cattle from far and near. As Liège and the surrounding parts of the valley have a large number of mouths to feed, mostly factory hands, shopkeepers and clerks, who own neither live stock, nor vegetable gardens, nor provisions, and as the army also had to be supplied, the problem of food was bound to become an acute one at an early stage. Therefore, hundreds of cows and pigs were brought into town from the villages likely to be first invaded from Germany. In this way German progress was hampered by the lack of supplies, and our defences were secured from the risks of famine. The poor cows had suffered from their rough and hurried journeys, they were frightened at the noise and traffic about them, they had been given insufficient or unaccustomed food, and irregularly milked, and they kept bellowing plaintively day and night in the meadows and open grounds in which they had been fenced. Many caught fevers, lay down, and died. The countrymen who attended to them were ready and businesslike among the crowd of townspeople who, being kept out of their shops and factories, stood gossiping and staring about in idleness. Through all the human anguish and pain the bellowing of the cattle sounded like the voice of universal suffering in the clutches of a pitiless Fate.

When preparation ceased, and actual resistance began, we townspeople could not realise, as the forts fired for practice before the game was started in earnest. I have been told that wooden bungalows which stood on the grass slopes of the forts in peace time for the accommodation of officers were all set on fire at a given signal, turning the forts into mere

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underground burrows. Although the firing was miles away we soon learned to distinguish attack and defence, big guns answering big guns in hurried reports and, what was more impressive to the imagination, the repulse of infantry attacks.

My friend the musician witnessed a night attack from the plain of Bressoux, where he was keeping the pigs of the garrison. The German storming parties marched up in thick lines, as steadily as if on parade, in the cold moonlight. The Belgian onlookers began to be anxious lest the enemy should be allowed to come too near, when a single long report of mitrailleuses, all firing together, sent them to the other world with a single puff. This was repeated time after time, and we knew what it meant when the dull, long report reverberated over the hills.

People who went near the forts later on told me they had seen the Germans lying in a heap, six and seven feet deep, wounded and killed mixed together, so numerous that their names and numbers could not possibly be collected. German officers went round, trying to find the bodies of brother officers, taking care of their cards, money and jewels, and saluting the remnants as they lay on the ground. The burying of the dead was performed by the officers on behalf of the burgomasters of parishes. Germans and Belgians were heaped up separately, often in the trenches in which they had been fighting, and covered up by order, over which water was poured. Then they were covered up with earth, to feed the roots of grass next spring. Attempts at getting hold of the occupation lists and watches were recorded as usual in the back. No doubt, however, that the fingers sometimes coming with the

finders had not time to wait. One little old collier, who had been there, told me that he would not care to get a ring that way !

The garrison of one fort is astonishingly small; some eighty men, gunners for long distance and infantry for repulsing storming parties. Sixteen men working mitrailleuses are said to suffice for sweeping the surroundings of a fort clean of the enemy. They are said to suffer quite as much from the heat, the smoke, and the nervous commotions within as from the attack from outside. I met several men who had been fighting days and days in the forts. They all complained of having had neither food nor sleep, and yet when they were offered food they would refuse it. The lower jaw projected in an attitude of dogged determination, and they kept abusing the enemy who was no longer there. Although they were physically exhausted, they showed no sign of yielding or fear. Probably their minds had lost their elasticity, and they just persisted in the moral attitude once taken up. Their sense of discipline remained very strong. They dragged their guns along, though they could hardly stand, and thought only of obeying orders and doing as they had been told.

One incident, which took place quite at the outset, exemplifies the way in which legends form in beleaguered cities. M. T., one of my neighbours, came running up and described a duel between a Zeppelin and two forts, the firing and the explosions. He had seen the airship get away unhurt. When referring to the *Times* some weeks after, I found the same skirmish described in quite a different way. Instead of one German Zeppelin, the *Times* correspondent had seen

two Belgian airmen fired at by German artillery, and soon after by two of our forts, which mistook them for aircraft of the enemy's. The shrapnels which exploded below the airmen had been mistaken by M. T. for shots fired from the big airship of his own imagination.

We soon came to believe nothing. If a story was brought to us, the question "Have you seen it?" usually sufficed to bring people to their senses. They would go and ring bells and tell strangers to leave their houses, because there was danger. When asked whether the danger would be less elsewhere, they had no reply. Tins of preserved meat, papers containing sandwiches, were dropped on the road by fugitives who had nowhere to go to, and who were afraid lest they might be short of food. One woman of the servant class became leaner every day with fright, and kept running to and fro, from house to house, holding her child by the hand and carrying bundles about. Probably a cellar, especially a modern, unvaulted one, is not much safer than any other shelter, but it allows people to anchor themselves to their homes, attend to some of their ordinary occupations, and it procures at least physical rest and a feeling of safety which is worth more than actual safety itself.

If the reader expects an account of battle and heroic deeds he will be disappointed to learn that my only experience of actual fighting reached me in bed, and never extracted me from it. This is what an auricular witness, knowing the features of the country and trying to realise what he hears, can perceive. First the boom of distant guns, fort of Boncelles firing as usual; nothing new in that. Then the crackle of

musketry, sounding exactly like the loading of a cart with the heavy pavement stones that make Belgian roads so rough and noisy. Two pitches, the deeper probably infantry rifle, the higher carbines of the cavalry. In between, the regular mechanical ticking of the machine-rifles (pom-poms) as persistent and steady as the pricking of the needle in a sewing machine, only much graver. All at once, cannon-shot near my house, the window-panes shaking. They must have put a battery on the hill behind the garden, and are probably firing across the river at the Germans who storm Boncelles. (This guess afterwards turned out to have been correct.) First, much firing in quick succession, then some short breaks. Evidently the fight is subsiding. Then more crackle of musketry and working of machine-guns. Silence. Short crackle again. A few reports of the pom-pom. Is it over? No, more shots. Calm again. And so gradually and slowly peace is restored. To-morrow we shall know what has happened. I only knew some days after, when a German officer told me, that Belgian guns had been found standing some distance behind my house.

This is a truthful account of a real battle. Let the reader think what he likes about it.

One of the inmates of my house simply remarked : "They fire so loud that they keep me awake." This is a fair illustration of the stolid indifference of the working-classes when not in the throes of actual panic, or engaged in wild gossiping stories. Either they make vain attempts at understanding, and go silly, or they throw up the whole thing in despair like a nightmare, and try to return to their usual business. No

doubt this is the wiser course for those not actually engaged in serving their cause and country.

The spirits of our nation, soldiers and civilians, could not have been so well kept up had we not known that we could rely on the support of the two nations whose battles our men were fighting—the English and the French. From Liège to the French frontier the distance is hardly three hours in a fast train, and the line to Paris runs under my windows. We listened for the shrill whistle of the engines of the company of the North, which might bring us reinforcements any minute. Rumours of the French coming, the French being come, floated about, and were finally confirmed by the sight of one Frenchman in uniform, who was conspicuously paraded about the town. Was the man a fraud, as we heard afterwards? He certainly brought hope, and made the subsequent disappointment all the more bitter. His appearance called forth demonstrations in honour of France, which only made a pitiful display of the passions of an excited city mob. Little tri-colour flags were sold and waved about, and the streets were filled with eager and happy crowds. It may be that our authorities winked at these demonstrations because they helped to keep the inhabitants hopeful and quiet for another day.

The distance from England being greater we could not hope for speedy assistance from that quarter. Future historians will dispel the mystery that still hangs over the part taken by British troops in the defence of Belgium. "The English are at Ans," a railwayman said to me shortly before the surrender of Liège. This left me sceptical, like other stories. But he maintained that he had it through a telegraph

operator, and that a well-known English gentleman in an official position was expecting the troops on the platform. Imagining that my knowledge of languages might be of some use, I galloped off to the station. No English troops, no English gentleman waiting for them. Where was he? Just gone. Where were they? Left their train at Tirlemont, halfway from Brussels. I never saw one, and give this rumour to be compared to similar accounts of the appearance of British troops near Liège.

Those amongst us who were not civil guards and could not enlist joined the Red Cross. As long as I stayed in Liège the supply of beds seemed more than sufficient, and most of the wounded in them were our own countrymen, as the attacking Germans could not be easily picked up and brought in. Motors were very useful in conveying the sufferers gently to safe resting places. As might be expected, with the numerous civilian population of a large town, the willingness to help was in excess of the knowledge and trained ability.

In all the hubbub of hope and talk of victory, I had my first sight of the new German war uniform. A large body of prisoners, with a tall, straight young man at their head, marched up and halted on the street leading to the station. All their garments and head covering were of the same colour, and only their faces showed against the monotonous khaki, which is a shade greener than the English army's, and still uglier in appearance. The familiar brass point on the helmet is muffled in a kind of cloth bag, which hides its shape, and the leather helmet itself entirely concealed by a cap of the same



stuff, so that nothing shining appears. Officers and sergeants are hard to tell from privates, unless one understands the meaning of stripes and bands. All the garments of the Germans seemed to be quite new, and their heavy leather boots, reaching halfway up the calves, looked as if just come from the shops. Having been familiar from childhood with the appearance of various German uniforms, some gaudy, and all neat, I stopped wondering what was that moss-coloured mass in front of me.

A motor which flew the English and French flags approached, and the ladies in it got up to examine the conquered enemy. They were quickly hushed by the crowd, which surrounded the German soldiers without any demonstration, and showed only curiosity. The contrast between the businesslike khaki of modern war and the showy uniforms of former days was very striking in Liège. Old King Leopold II. obstinately refused to sanction any change in military dress as long as certain more important reforms, which he had at heart, were not carried out. After his death, changes were contemplated, but they never got beyond the experimental stage. The consequence was that the Belgian army marched in garments the colour and fashion of which was some 40 years behind the times. Whether the results were very bad for our poor men I cannot tell, but they did look picturesque and queer when compared to the monotone greenish grey of the Germans. Funniest of all were our chasseurs à pied, with enormous peaks to their small caps, flowing wide capes and green and yellow garments. A striking sight was a fine lancer with a basket containing carrier pigeons strapped to his back like a knapsack. The

pigeons fluttered restlessly about inside the wicker-work of their moveable residence. Pigeon-flying is a universal and favourite form of sport in Belgium, and homing pigeons were extensively used by our army and by German spies.

Never was the need for military training in a nation more sadly exemplified than in the rise of national pride and anguish that the German challenge called forth among us. We all wanted to be useful, and envied our lucky soldiers, who knew their place and duty. But the larger part of our manhood was without guidance and knowledge. The younger men could enlist, and did so in large numbers. All classes, from the aristocracy to the people, showed themselves worth their salt. At best it meant six weeks' training near Antwerp, before they were fit to take the field. And we all knew that six weeks' delay was fatal. They went all the same. Some were kept back by anxious and tearful families. One friend of mine, the head of an electrical light and power company, was prevented from enlisting by his director, who could not spare his services. A colleague, a former officer of the civil guard, was refused when he offered his services. The time limit (35 for men without previous military experience, 45 for former soldiers) excluded many who wanted to go. The volunteers were marched off four deep, in any clothing they had on, most carrying a little bag or bundle. Their cry was the old shout of the insulted and angry beast, no patriotic or political motto, but just the primeval fury of the male bent on fighting: "Vive la guerre!" Some were said to shout: "A bas les Alboches!" ("Down with the Germans!") but this I never heard. Very little poli-

tical reasoning or thought seemed to be current among the people. War had been forced upon us without our provocation or expectation. Well, then, let it be war. "Vive la guerre!" The fever caught even women, who waved their hands to the volunteers and wept. One sudden bond of brotherhood united those who remained to face the siege.

The most tragic example of the breakdown of untrained goodwill in the face of a sudden emergency was that of the civil guard. This obsolete institution, which dates back to the year of our Revolution and Constitution, 1830, is an armed body of such civilians as can afford to find their own uniforms. They elect their own officers, are armed with Mauser rifles, and have to perform patrol and sentry duty, and maintain order while the army is otherwise engaged. The organisation, which is not military, is vicious, because they have no trained commanders with official responsibilities. They have been found useful in peace time when there were labour troubles and riots, for they act less drastically than soldiers would, and can handle a mob with greater patience and tact. During the siege of Liège their zeal was exemplary, and their numbers and armament ought to have made them very useful, especially as volunteers from them might have been used in dangerous duties. Yet the fact of their not being soldiers prevented their being used for any active work. Their duties were to stand sentry at important points on the railway lines, to guard bridges and cross-roads, to examine passports when the spy-hunting made it necessary that every traveller in Belgium should be provided with papers, and to relieve the soldiers at all places where armed men were

required, about prisons, and round the military stores. Their tall, round hats with red facings were everywhere associated with the army uniforms. I even saw one of them cheerfully join a patrol of regulars, and when he was asked where he was going, reply : "I'm going with the others." But this was child's play, comic relief in the tragedy.

All this display of patriotism made me feel very much ashamed of my uselessness. Here I was, idly looking on while others were giving their lives for our defence. I resolved to join the civil guard, but was delayed by the want of a uniform.

When at last I was provided with a gun, a bayonet and cartridges, I joined my company in a school, where I found young barristers, men of business and shopkeepers sitting and lying about in the clean straw or drinking water from the single bottle they had, in the playground of the school. Very untidy they looked, some with coats unbuttoned, some in shirt sleeves. Guns were leaning against the walls. They wanted news, for that very morning they had been told that the town must surrender, and that they had to lay down their arms. This was afterwards denied, but it had broken their spirits, and made them a prey to conjectures, doubts and hesitations. They were utterly demoralised. Yet even then the better educated among them, professional men and gentlemen of the upper class, were willing to do their duty to the utmost, and would rather have faced useless death than the shame of laying down their arms without firing a shot. Let this be a warning to men who think it sufficient to love their country without learning in times of peace how to defend it in times of danger.

They all looked upon my volunteering as an utter waste of goodwill, and there was nothing else for it than bowing to the inevitable, and leaving a place where I was not wanted.

The further fate of the civil guard of Liège was a very sad one. First one hundred of the guards were taken as hostages by the Germans, to be shot dead in case of an attack by civilians. This fortunately did not occur, and a smaller number of chosen hostages, men in prominent positions, soon took their places. Then the civil guards were ordered to help the local policemen in maintaining public order. Both the police and guards were without their arms, and in undress uniforms. This, after all, was bearable, for the duty was not dishonourable, and was performed in assistance of Belgian countrymen. But what the townspeople felt most was the obligation of keeping the cattle and pigs. As long as the live stock belonged to Belgium that occupation appeared in a humorous light. As soon as the supplies passed into German hands it became an intolerable grievance and shame. The watching of cows, which is an amusing pastime in good weather, especially to those who are fond of reading, and a source of pride to the owner of a fine herd of cattle, is despised by our city people as the lowest of trades. In half a century's time the Liégeois will still remember with loathing that he, or some one of his people, has once been compelled to keep the pigs and cows for the German army.

We in the city never clearly understood the reasons and terms of that surrender, which took us all by surprise, while we were proud of the resistance of our forts, and hopeful of further success. I was told that

the Germans had threatened to bombard the town by firing their howitzers over the forts and into the valley. This threat was believed by my informant to be an idle boast, as the distance was too great. While we all knew the town to be open, we imagined that the position of the forts made an attack upon us impossible as long as they held out. Yet the facts are that the bombardment was twice begun, and that the town was occupied while the forts, so far as we knew, were still holding out. Another report was that one of the forts (Barchon) had been damaged and silenced by the Germans; another that the two northernmost, which covered the approach to the Dutch frontier, had been neutralised, whatever that may mean. I give this as an example of the wild surmises and stories that are circulated in a besieged town, when no positive news is published. The official history of the war will, when it is written, show how far those reports were founded.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE TWO BOMBARDMENTS.

WE were told that the Germans were threatening to shell the town, which they had already entered, unless the forts, which they could not storm or otherwise take, were ordered to surrender. This was thought to be against international law, as the General was up in Fort Loncin, away from the town, and had lost all command of and touch with the city. There also was a rumour that our burgomaster (one of the hostages) had been allowed to proceed to Brussels, to ask our King to order the surrender of the forts in consequence of the threat to bombard us civilians. Some people were frantic with fear. We simply told them that they would be quite safe and comfortable in their cellars, and we had beds and mattresses prepared, and went to rest. It came as a surprise to the poor to learn that, as they owned no houses, it could not matter very much to them whether buildings were damaged or not, and I managed to cheer them up by reminding them that we were only tenants, and that, if the houses went, the rentals would lapse as well.

My own people were quiet, trustful, and good-humoured as usual, quick at obeying orders and always ready for a joke, although no one was altogether free from fear. The servant of a neighbour who had gone to spend the night at a Red Cross hospital, asked permission to bring her mattress to our cellar,

which was imagined to be safer from shells than hers, and was certainly safer from panic. We had a little music and spent a cheerful evening in the front garden. Then we retired to our improvised bedrooms, which we found very comfortable, after opening every window in the house for fear of the commotion breaking the glass. Finally we found the excitement quite superfluous, as the firing was directed to the centre of the town, and quite away from our neighbourhood. While my people slept soundly I listened to the sound of shells. It was very similar to the shrill yell of a small dog in the distance, the explosion following after, like the crackling of fireworks. No light or loud noise reached our neighbourhood, and we laughed very heartily when all was over. I do not think the bombardment lasted long. My friend the musician, who lived right in the heart of the town, and was kept up at night by his duties as a civil guard, saw the shells come down to the embankments of the river and explode in fiery showers, which he found an impressive sight.

When I went to inspect the damage done to the town I saw nothing more tragic than the effects of a big fire. Windows shattered, walls scratched (by shrapnel, I presume), and where the shells had set fire to furniture or buildings, the roofs gone and the black holes of burnt out windows. Some people were said to have been wounded, but sleeping in a cellar seemed a fairly safe precaution, which everybody took. Suppose it was of no other use than re-assuring the timid, that was an important point, for the fear of death, which is worse than death, hits many, while death reaches only a few. No street that I saw had more than one



or two houses damaged. The most picturesque effect was the harm done to a large chestnut tree in a square, the roots of which had been denuded of earth, and stood bare in a hole, while the leaves on top remained fresh and green.

As we had got so well through the first bombardment, we only laughed at the second, deciding to sleep in our cellars if we felt afraid, and spending a peaceful night after listening a little to the now familiar yell and crash. I heard no noise during the fight that could be compared to a clap of thunder, and that does not frighten many healthy people. Perhaps superstition is the most dangerous part of a bombardment, as it undoubtedly is of a thunderstorm.

Fear is an emotion which no man can escape altogether. We naturally talked over that psychological problem a good many times after the bombardment. Some of us confessed to a merely physical fear, which works through the system and leaves the soul untouched. Many admitted having been frightened at the sight of shells bursting or enemies rushing up without being therefore moved from their determination to stand their ground and do their duty. So far as I observed, the people with the most unaffected and natural contempt of danger are old men of the lower classes, whom their trades and the difficulties of life have more than once brought to the verge of death.

Many memories of the war of 1870 were recalled among them, for although Belgium was not actually engaged in that year, yet she had to line the frontiers, defend our neutrality, and disarm such of the belligerents as happened to enter our territory. Old working men told us how they had stood their ground

and heard the cannon of Sedan roaring, and helped to cheer up the timid with their good temper and fearlessness. The well-to-do are more effeminate, but make up for a less hardened disposition by a higher moral consciousness, perhaps also by the habit of self-analysis, which compels them to take up an attitude of which they need not be ashamed.

Leonard, with whom the siege brought me into more intimate relations than before, and whose reactions were emotional, while mine, a bookish man's, were rather of the intellectual type, came to tell me of the occasions when he had had to face death at the pit bottom. Once he had had to walk a distance of about four miles with water up to his chin, after his lamps had been extinguished, and had guided himself in the darkness by holding on to a ventilating pipe overhead. At other times he had nearly died from a horse's kick and from the fall of an enormous weight of coal, which nearly crushed him. What were our present risks, as civilians, when compared to those which a labourer has to run for the sake of a few shillings daily wages?

Women, who so often brave death and disease in peace time, and know how to face the risks of child-bearing, are not brave in war time, nor do they pretend to be. An old farmer's lady told me: "I very nearly died last year, and did not care much, but now I find I am afraid of death." Yet she understood that she was in no actual danger. That instinctive fear of the half-educated often goes with a neglect of elementary precautions. Before one of the bombardments, I hurriedly shouted to neighbours: "Put your bedding in your cellar, they are going to shell the town." Instead

of doing as they were told, and securing themselves, they stood motionless, and the husband finally said: "Don't shout like that, you are frightening my wife." He was obviously right, but why not carry his mattress to the cellar?

The same carelessness appeared in the farmer's wife referred to above. To keep up her spirits and those of her servant, a burly country girl who shook like an aspen leaf, I asked permission to inspect their underground dairy, and declared that it was the most secure and beautifully vaulted cellar in Europe. "Well," said the old woman, "I won't take my mattress down, I'll sit up all night in the armchair on the ground floor." So they went sleepless, and became all the more nervous.

One great cause of anxiety was the very general ignorance of our people with regard to the rules of warfare, and the rights and position of civilians. They knew no more on these subjects than the average Englishman and American, who, being comfortably out of danger on his side of the water, has no need of understanding the technicalities of surrender, occupation, and martial law. Those of us who knew better had to explain to our neighbours that a German army is a strictly disciplined body of men, whose officers try to keep them together and to have them well in hand. We taught them that, as civilians have no right to interfere, so they ought not to be hurt or insulted, and we encouraged them to expect better treatment from an occupying army than we ventured to hope for ourselves. Unfortunately, our country people, prompted by a natural resentment at the invasion of their land, had made the mistake of firing at the enemy without

being soldiers, and had thus brought down pitiless reprisals upon themselves and their neighbours. Reports went about of houses burnt, women shot dead, whole families butchered. What could we Belgians say but advise the younger men to enlist, and enjoin upon the rest the duty of keeping the peace and submit to the unavoidable, when it came?

One form of suffering which the war brought very much to my notice, and which I have myself experienced most sharply, is the pain of trying to calculate the possible course and consequences of an event that passes all human foresight, and can only be realised gradually. Of this my good people knew nothing, as they never looked any further than the actual physical risks of the day. Possibilities of starvation in a remote future, the economic results of this war on the world's markets, the upheaval of all commercial conditions, the necessity for social and financial readjustment afterwards, and, most of all, the sufferings it was going to bring down on the poor of all nations, those were subjects which gave no trouble to them, and which kept me awake trying to adjust and work them out within myself.

"You think too much, Sir," Leonard would say, watching my face affectionately. Then he would try to remember stories and jokes, which would sometimes bring a smile into my face. Those attempts at cheering me up were all the more pathetic as I was becoming more and more conscious of the deep gulf that separates a student and reader like myself from the good, kind-hearted but unthinking people with whom I was suddenly brought into such intimate contact.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SURRENDER.

IN the morning of Thursday the 6th occurred the only external and visible incident of the campaign that it was my fate to witness. A ring at the bell called us all up before breakfast.

"It is dangerous to remain here! You must go away!"

"Who told you so?"

"A lancer who rode up just now."

"Well, if a lancer said so, we may as well obey."

We packed some breakfast into a portmanteau, gave the cats plenty of milk, locked the doors, and marched out into the rain, which came pelting down on our umbrellas. Where to? Anywhere, up the road. Down comes a woman running, with the rain streaming down her hair.

"Why do you come this way?"

"I was warned to come down, because there is danger up there."

Here was a panic. Those that were on the hill came down, and those that were below came up. In the nearest house, a farm and porter's lodge rolled into one, we might at least find shelter from the rain, which was doing us more harm than the German army, and try to make a meal. I knocked.

"Are you Germans?" said a voice within.

"Madame," I replied, "you have seen me pass your door these two years, and might well know who I am."

"Yes, but are you German?"

"No, I am not."

"Well, I have seen you talk with Dr. N.; come in."

The good lady was sure that no German ever could have talked with our good friend the Doctor, but though I knew her to be very much mistaken, I entered and proceeded to butter bread and distribute victuals. When confidence was restored she offered coffee. The husband, who looked no braver than he needed be, was glad to find that silly jokes and fresh company cheered up his wife. We made up a very miscellaneous party. The cautious farmer, an elderly man of few words, his wife, a kind-hearted woman if she had not been so afraid of Germans, and the farm servant, a strong, young girl, with big arms, who shook and nearly fainted with fear. When asked what she was afraid of, she gave the reply which I have heard from the lips of many women: "I don't know"; and our endeavours to explain to her that the Germans fight neither civilians nor women made no impression.

An old Flemish road-mender only regretted that he was no longer young and a soldier, as he had been in the year '70, and he pretended to level an imaginary gun, like a school-boy playing the soldier.

Suddenly a number of Belgian cannon drove up the road. This was the retreat of the Belgian army that had held the valley of the Vesdre. Behind the artillery rode a body of lancers. Then a few chasseurs, who sat on the roadside watching the ascent.

The men accepted bread, and went on munching it. One little chasseur suggested making a stand and having another shot at the enemy, whom we never saw, but who had been lately in pursuit. No, their

orders were to retreat, and away they went over the hill.

More Belgians came up later in the day, exhausted with fighting, but still resolute. Their knapsacks were getting too heavy for them and were dropped on the roadside. Behind the hardier, red-faced labourers and farmers came two pale and worn young men, probably students, one supporting the other, and neither able to walk any further. "Could they rest a little in my house?"

Not knowing what risks they incurred by lagging behind, I asked one of the stronger soldiers whether I might allow them some rest. He raised his eyebrows, but as the youngsters were nearly dropping down, I hoisted them both across the garden and upon my bed.

"Did they want food?"—"No."

"Drink?"—"No, only sleep."

There they lay—no shouting could awaken them—for two hours and a half.

I walked down to the station, and heard an officer ask a townsman to lead his men to Fort Lantin, and pick up as many as possible, lest they should remain prisoners of the Germans. This opened my eyes to the fact that my two boys ought to be packed off at once. I ran home, shook and dressed them, dragged them off to the station with their guns and put them in charge of a sergeant, who promised to see them off. Many were saved in this way from being prisoners of war. Others remained behind and were taken.

The road was lined with arms, sacks and military accoutrements which had been dropped by soldiers in their retreat. These were promptly picked up and re-

moved by the city scavengers, and our hillside resumed its idyllic appearance.

All these signs of disaster did not damp the ardour of the gossips, who went on commenting on the heavy losses suffered by the German army, and boasting of past and future successes and victories. In the evening a printed paper from our burgomaster was brought, which contained instructions to the Belgian authorities and civilians about their position and conduct if parts of our territory was occupied by a foreign force. No other formal announcement of the surrender was made. We looked at our bridge; not blown up yet. Would it be destroyed the next morning?

"They are passing," was the first news on Friday, August 7th. My task was at an end. I had been useless to my country, and my duty now was to put my house in order and join my family in Brussels. But first I must teach my people how to behave in their unwonted condition. I took Leonard down to the river, and so to the bridge of the Boverie, that was lined with German sentries. Very young men, with full cheeks and quiet manners, all in the same greenish-yellow, the long shining bayonets the only warlike thing about them. I spoke to one, a college boy, in spectacles, who said with a gentle voice: "We shall do no harm to anyone. We only want to pass through this country." The public, who were not numerous, and very quiet, were allowed to cross the bridge singly.

Between the Belgian retreat and the German occupation occurred a short interval during which our police wore plain clothes, and nobody apparently was responsible for public



order. It is astonishing that no one should have taken advantage of it for looting or acts of violence. The only case of anyone trying to appropriate what did not belong to them that came to my knowledge was that of a boy who looked for fruit in deserted gardens in my neighbourhood. A lady whose only thought was the safety of the house that she had lately built, inquired of him, as he came down the hill, whether he had seen anything. She meant batteries, boxes of shrapnel and other destructive machinery. "No," he said, "I was looking for pears and could not find one."

The cattle had become less noisy after a few days' stay in the town. A number of them had fallen dead every day, and the rest stood lowing sadly in the fields. Before the Germans took possession of them a number escaped and could be taken away by anyone who had a mind for them. The slaughterhouse very wisely killed off as many as they could and distributed the meat to the poor without payment. In this way the distress incident to war was reduced for a short period at least.

I record these incidents in the same disorder in which they were brought to my knowledge, no logical account being possible when rumours and facts crowded each other so hurriedly and confusedly.

In the afternoon I saw the Germans taking possession of the railway station, in which they found an ambulance train, some twenty engines, and vast supplies left behind by our army. Our railwaymen were ordered to remain at their command, but never had to work for them while I was there.

The Belgians whom I met said very little, though

the sorrow and anger at this triumph of brutal Force was universal. Being left without newspapers, we learned nothing about what happened in the outside world, nor did we care very much. What Russia or England might be doing was no concern of ours. We were in Liège, and conquered. A beleaguered town is a world to itself, and imagines its own fate to be the beginning and end of all history. Probably the toughness of each soldier in holding his own small plot of ground is due to a similar narrowing down of ideas and feelings.

The illiterate classes, whose lives always move in a narrow circle, do not appear to suffer from being thus enclosed and fenced off from the outside world. To those who are accustomed to reading and travel it soon becomes intolerable.

On Saturday the 8th, in the afternoon, I caught sight of my colleague, Mr. N., the historian, sadly walking up the road. We felt this meeting as a deliverance from a nightmare. He had spent his nights in the cellar of a frightened lady, who liked to have plenty of people in the rooms next to hers while the shells were exploding, and he was shaking off the atmosphere of unreasoning terror in which he had been merged. Here was a chance for us to discuss history in the making! He quoted the views of men of learning, Belgian and German, on the problems of the day. A Berlin historian had explained to him that German unity had not been completed by Bismarck, and that all the outlying dependencies which had once belonged to the Empire must be brought under it again. This line of argument, which was a mere harking back to a dead past and lacked all foundation in the needs of modern times, we agreed was of little value.

The big fact was that the Hohenzollern dynasty, relying on their fighting powers, had always succeeded in the past, often against terrific odds. History, my historian informed me, taught that a bold offensive is often successful. So we went on, relieving our minds with the commonplaces of journalistic thinking and bookish memories, the personal touches being added by the fact that historical science was, to both of us, embodied in living men. Our native historians we found to have been greatly mistaken in their judgments on the present situation. One of them, a man of world-wide connections and much learning, had been perfectly certain that the German Emperor would not go to war, and that if war did come, our country would not be invaded. Such is the wisdom of the learned !

I am in constant touch with men who write books and who lecture to others, and have had many opportunities of testing their capacity for guessing at political events near at hand. My invariable experience was that they made mistakes as glaring as those of the man in the street.

Our conversation now turned to the future of our little Mother Land. Suppose we were forced into an alliance with, or vassal position to, Germany, what should our public servants do ? Take an oath to the new master, as we had done to our own Government ? Emigrate ? Men who had families to support had not much choice. Even if they submitted, their services might not be accepted unless they knew the German language. The English islander may wonder that such conversations should have been possible, yet they were the natural outcome of events and circumstances.

While we conversed, the broad valley with its

crowded buildings was spreading out under our feet, and the familiar gleam of the river between the bridges was as cheerful as ever. The birds twittered overhead, and we repeated the sentiment so often heard during the week: "How kind and gentle Nature is, while Man is at his world-old trade of butchering his fellow man." Then we talked of our reading and professional interests, just as if there had never been other wars than those recorded in libraries and expounded in lecture-rooms.

Sunday, August 9th.—

We are quickly recovering from the nervous tension of preceding days, and need new ideas and fresh company. The streets of Liège are now lined with troops. The men lie and sit about on ammunition cars and guns. The field kitchens are busy. All their outfits and arms can be inspected at ease. Everything is brand new, and the men themselves in admirable condition. They do not look dusty or soiled by their marches and fights, possibly because the colour of their clothes is so very like dirt.

In the midst of this warlike display a congregation comes out of the neighbouring church after Mass. Two short servant-girls pass between the soldiers, holding their Mass books, and titter shyly under the glance of the young men, who grin and nod at them. Perhaps those girls' brothers and sweethearts are lying dead, and have been killed by those very Germans. Here, on the Lord's Day, are the two old heathen deities at work again, Mars the Destroyer, and Venus the Reproducer, as brutal as Lucretius has pictured them centuries ago. Who could help shuddering?

Monday, August 10th.—

Leonard, who has been ordered back to his colliery by his manager, wants a permit to pass the batteries placed near our house yesterday. The sentry refers us to the sergeant, and the sergeant to the lieutenant.

This is my only chance to tell my reader what a Prussian officer was like, when at his best. He could not grant the permit, and asked permission to have a wash in my house. Soon we found ourselves conversing, he admired my dahlias, and when we ventured on politics, I found him an impartial and clear-minded man. Though he at first seemed to believe that Belgium ought to have granted their army permission to pass through her territory, he soon admitted that our view of the matter was a legitimate one, and he had nothing but praise for the defence made by our poor soldiers. He repeatedly complained of the attacks of our civilians on their military, and I had to explain to him that the rules of warfare were quite unknown to our people. I was pleased, as a philologist and lecturer, to learn from him that teachers of all grades make patriotic and brave fighters, and finally we parted with mutual good wishes for Belgian freedom and for his personal welfare. His last words were a promise to order his soldiers to treat Belgians kindly for my sake. Although I cannot regard the butchering of one's brother men as an amiable profession, yet I had met a soldier who was also a gentleman. He was a lieutenant from a Silesian town. If he is left alive this may be brought to his notice.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE OCCUPATION.

WHEN the Germans occupied Verviers a proclamation was issued by their commander to the inhabitants, promising to spare their lives and property, and to pay in gold for any merchandise needed by the military, and reminding them that Belgians and Germans had been allied at Waterloo.

No such document was published in Liège, all communications to the public being headed: "By order of the German Military Authority," and signed by the burgomaster. The disarmament of the civil guard and the taking of hostages for the quiet behaviour of the native population were the first measures taken in our town. All weapons were ordered to be given up on penalty of death. I found it somewhat difficult to obey this latter command, as it only came to my knowledge a day after the delay had elapsed. When I ran home to do away with a little carbine that lay in my bedroom, I found some Germans in occupation of a neighbouring house. The work of taking the carbine to pieces, of throwing screws, stock, lock, barrel and cartridges away separately into adjoining building sites was carried out in exciting silence, with the animating question: "Are they going to discover and shoot me?" constantly pressing on my mind.

Such emotions are inseparable from a state of war,

they cannot fail of having some effect even on pretty steady nerves, and when they are over satisfactorily, leave a pleasant exhilaration in the mind.

I cannot say a word in contradiction of the reports of German atrocities that have appeared in English newspapers, but as a truthful witness I am bound to state that, with a single, unimportant exception, all the German officers and soldiers whom I saw in Liège behaved with civility and good temper. The loud voice which we have all heard from the mouths of Prussian men in uniform was hushed, the imperious and aggressive manner was restrained. All spoke and behaved gently, apologised for the trouble they gave, and explained that they only wanted to pass. The orders given to the invading army must have been very strict, and it was obviously the policy of the invading force to make themselves as welcome as possible.

There was a ludicrous side to this attempt at drawing a velvet glove over the iron hand. All shop windows were ordered to be opened, so that the town might resume its usual appearance. Unfortunately no one bought anything. Germans in uniform purchased vegetables at a high price in the market, speaking excellent French. They entered cafés, cigar shops and restaurants, and spent money to revive business. But they were the only people there. The electric tram cars were ordered to move out, and tried to do so. No one thought of entering them. In one word, German discipline ruled their soldiers perfectly, it failed to make us Belgians forget the fate of our unhappy town.

I have more than once been asked questions about the numbers of Germans in Liège. The talk of the

town was that they were few, and far from confident of maintaining their hold. As they were housed in the larger public and private buildings, in barracks, schools, yards and convents, obviously for the purpose of keeping them together and maintaining discipline among them, we found it difficult to estimate their numbers. Although tired with long marches and complaining of the scarcity of food on preceding days, they looked well fed and prosperous, their full cheeks bearing testimony to the care and attention which they had received before the war was started. Most of them were young, and had probably been selected for the more trying service of the front. They hailed from all parts of Prussia, all provinces being represented in each regiment.

The town was perfectly policed. At first, short machine-guns were placed in important positions, so that any attempt of the natives to make trouble should be visited with instant repression. These were soon removed, and while the native policemen and civil guards stood on duty, unarmed, German soldiers rode through the streets on bicycles, and were silently watched by the few Belgians who ventured into the streets.

I witnessed the mid-day parade of the large body of Germans who kept the Palace of Justice, where I believe one of the Prussian princes had taken up his residence. It did not work with the clock-like precision of ordinary German parades, and the men had some difficulty in falling into line. The Hahnenschritt of the officers (the movement of the leg upwards without bending the knee) was perfect.

There was nothing else to do in Liège, and it was



difficult to attend to one's reading in all the hubbub of war and gossiping. But as no trains moved from the town station, and as the post office was closed, we looked upon ourselves as locked out from the rest of Belgium, and as prisoners to the Germans. To my surprise, I learned that communications with Brussels were maintained from the high level station of Ans, just outside Liège, and that engines or trains covered the distance every day.

Early in the next morning, August 11th, we started, avoiding trenches and batteries. The outposts kept the streets of the town, with groups of men under sergeants and sentries on the look-out. We walked on, always expecting to be challenged and turned back, and seeing the now familiar greyish-green helmets and bayonets peeping over hedges and out of railway cuttings. The colliers and their families stood about in idle gossip. Suddenly we came on a little crowd collected round a stretcher.

"Poor man! What did they shoot him for?"

"He had gone to fetch fodder for his rabbits. The sentry shouted 'Halt!' He caught fright and ran away!"

"Dead at once?"—"Yes!"

I warned my companion to hold his tongue, to listen, and if we were ordered to halt, to stop at once and lift his hands up. More helmets and bayonets watching us. More outposts. At last a bearded sentry with a frightened face waved us to move backward. There was then no chance of getting out.

"Yes, there was," a railwayman told me. "The station is commanded by the fire of Fort Loncin, and no German dare enter it. There are engines going

now and then. My son shall take you round behind the house."

We walked down quietly and passed through a brickmaking yard, to go unnoticed. The engine was under steam, and as there were five passengers, mostly railway men, we were allowed the luxury of a third-class car. We lay down flat on the seats, in case the Germans shot. The usual silly war telegram was handed round and gloated over: "Berlin on fire. Great German defeat," etc.

The most truculent character amongst us was a red-faced railwayman who had been to China, and who evidently enjoyed the adventure and excitement. He laughed at cowardice, boasted of Belgian victories, and helped to keep up high spirits and a flow of conversation among the party. When *he* met the Germans, *he* was not going to take off his hat first; not he!

After a three miles journey we came to a standstill. The engine-driver wanted to steam on in order to buy a newspaper, as he said. The telegraph wires had been cut, and one of the stations ahead of us was reported to be in the power of the Germans. All the passengers decided to walk on along the line, and we proceeded cheerfully, making plans about marching and hiring conveyances. The next station, Waremmé, was in the hubbub of war. Some broken Belgian soldiery was collecting under a martial little sergeant. There had been a fight. The natives had had to leave their doorsteps and retire into their houses while Germans and Belgians fired and skirmished in their streets. When peace was restored, they had been able to resume their conversations in the open air. A

German prince had been wounded, bandaged, and removed in a motor.

A pathetic sight was a group of three Chinese students from the University of Liège, youths of the Mandarin caste, with small hands and polite manners. They told us, in their harsh accent, and with the humble Oriental smile, how they, of all men, had been taken for German spies. No money would hire any kind of conveyance, because the country people were afraid lest their horses should be commandeered by the enemy.

I was provided with a passport, the wording of which was solemn and obsolete, and off I marched again, in the company of a young doctor, whose cheerfulness and good temper were a better security than the Red Cross badge on his sleeve. We saw a party of horsemen crossing the bridge over the railway line, a patrol of hostile cavalry. Then a telegraph post with all the wires cut, their ends hanging loosely over the hedge. An old keeper of a level-crossing had seen the operation being performed. Four men had driven up in a motor, two had climbed up the post like monkeys, and in a minute all the wires were down. There was nothing for him but to go and report it at the nearest station.

Our engine, which had picked us up on the line, steamed into an orderly Belgian station again when reaching Landen. Here were more broken soldiers, lame, tired, in all kinds of soiled uniforms, and fugitives. Country people carrying bundles, families with children, all the women with red eyes, all the men staring in front of them with lips firmly closed, and everybody was helpful and kind.

The military men were mostly invalided from the front, after severe fighting. Where had they been? They did not know, and named a village that we had never heard about. One man had lost the power of speech and of thought. Another, quite a child, explained that if the French had not come to their assistance, they must have given way. No sign of fear or even discouragement here.

We had to change to another train at Tirlemont, halfway between Liège and Brussels, where, in the bright sunshine, stood a Belgian field army, orderly and bold, very unlike the weary and dusty little soldiers whom we had seen before. A huge train of motor vans and lorries of all shapes and colours had to perform the duties of transport. That army afterwards had to retreat to Antwerp before overwhelming numbers of invaders. Aeroplanes flew over it in the bright sunshine, and were able to see and photograph every detail.

A tearful Italian lady in front of me was the wife of a well-known Flemish sculptor. She thought of the loss of property and savings. Put not thy trust in earthly goods! Her husband had just been finishing the statue of a noted scientist for the University of Liège. Who wanted statues now? The world had gone mad, no use thinking about it. Cossacks and Japanese sailors moving in one part of the world, Canadians in another, Negroes and Turcos on the march in the five quarters of the globe. What could we say? Let those that could not fight go back to their work. There was nothing else left to do.

So we reached Louvain, where we were turned out of our second-class compartment to make room for

## THE SIEGE OF LIEGE

German prisoners. A tall young uhlan, no doubt an officer, stepped in, and was silently watched by the crowd. A guard astonished us by asking for our tickets. What did he mean? Pay on arrival.

The Brussels station was kept by civil guards. No one allowed in or out without a passport. Everyone wore a badge with the national tri-colour, black, yellow and red. Flags at nearly every window. Still, this was no longer war, but only martial law.

August 12th.—

What to do now? Either face the German occupation, which was inevitable, as Brussels is an open town without any natural or artificial defences, or move into neutral territory. The occupation, being unopposed, was bound to be orderly and peaceful, and life must be bearable as long as supplies of money and food did not run short. When this might happen it was impossible to foretell. Those that could leave would reduce the number of mouths to be fed, and thus relieve some of the impending misery. The Red Cross were in no need of helpers, as the whole female population was at their command. No other sphere of useful activity remained open to a civilian, and the attempt at reading, which had broken down in Liège, could hardly be a success in Brussels. London was near at hand, and a friend's children were just going to be taken over. Let it be London, then, while the uhlands, Cossacks, and other representatives of European civilisation were hacking and blowing each other to pieces. Those that shall survive shall see the ruins and the graves, and try to rebuild what the war is breaking down.

The boat that took us across from Ostend was still

a piece of free Belgian soil, a Royal Mail Steamer, flying the flag that we had never worshipped enough in prosperous days, and that now stands for courage in disaster. The children played about on deck, while we watched the fair open sea, without one of the fishermen's sails with which it is usually crowded. All the poor have been drafted into the armies, or driven from their employment, to face starvation very soon. We kept close to the French coast, giving the naval harbour of Dover a wide berth. All the familiar little Belgian watering places passed us one after another, and the children repeated the names of villages where they had played on the sands. Then came Dunkirk and Calais. French tugs hailed us through their megaphones: "Have you seen any warships?"—"No!" "Have you any news of the war?"—"No!" In the evening light the outlines of warships began to show, destroyers, cruisers, torpedo boats were descried by those that believed they knew them at sight. Folkestone pier; we prepare to land.

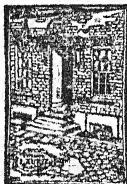
My last thought under the Belgian flag was for my former students, many of them privates, some dead and buried, some in hospitals, some prisoners of war, some besieged in Antwerp, where they may fire another shot.

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